

Message Text

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15

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SUBJ: DEMOCRATIZATION OF CORTES' PARLIAMENTARY WORK

SUMMARY: CORTES HAS ADOPTED CHANGES IN ITS OWN RULES TO ALLOW FOR CAUCUSES BY PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS AND FOR PLENARY DEBATE. GOVT FAVORS STEP AS MEANS OF STREAMLINING WORK OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND POLITICAL OBSERVERS SEE IT AS THE START OF A MEASURE OF POLITICAL PLURALISM IN SPANISH PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICES. END SUMMARY

1. THE RULES COMMITTEE OF THE SPANISH CORTES ADOPTED FEB 4, TWO

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PROPOSALS BY CORTES PRESIDENT FERNANDEZ MIRANDA WHICH ALLOW FOR

OFFICIAL SANCTION OF PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS AND FOR
PLENARY DEBATE OF GOVT BILLS ON THEIR FIRST READING.
GROUPS ARE OBLIGATED TO HAVE A MINIMUM MEMBERSHIP OF 50 --
ALTHOUGH 25 ARE ALLOWED AS A PROVISIONAL MEASURE -- AND
MUST DRAFT A PROGRAM OF THEIR OBJECTIVES WHICH, TOGETHER
WITH THE MEMBERSHIP, MUST BE PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL
RECORD OF THE CORTES. ALSO THE CORTES PRESIDENT NOW MAY
DECIDE TO HAVE A PLENARY DEBATE ON A GOVT BILL ON FIRST
READING IN THE CORTES RATHER THAN DROPPING IT INTO THE
COMMITTEE MORASS WHERE BILLS CAN LANGUISH IN OBSCURITY.

2. ACCORDING TO A MEMBER OF THE REFORMIST "GRUPO
PARLIAMENTARIO", THE CORTES CHANGES STEM FROM A GOVT
INITIATIVE TO STREAMLINE THE FORTHCOMING CONSIDERATION OF
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS. HERETOFORE, GOVT BILLS WERE
OFTENTIMES DELAYED BY INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS MADE BY A
LARGE NUMBER OF DEPUTIES (A RECENT BILL HAD OVER 2,000

VENDMENTS FROM A PARLIAMENT OF 565 MEMBERS). ALTHOUGH
THE GOVT COULD USUALLY EXPECT TO HAVE ITS BILLS ADOPTED,
THEY WERE OFTENTIMES MANGLED ALMOST BEYOND RECOGNITION
IN COMMITTEE. BY ALLOWING FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF
PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS OF CAUCUSES, THE GOVT HOPES TO LIMIT
THE NUMBER OF INTERVENTIONS BY INDIVIDUAL DEPUTIES AND HAVE
POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AIRED EARLY IN PUBLIC DEBATE RATHER
THAN IN THE TOO COZY ATMOSPHERE OF THE COMMITTEES,
MANIPULATED BY ENTRENCHED REGIME INTERESTS.

3. THE "GRUPO PARLIAMENTARIO", THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY
GROUP TO OPERATE INFORMALLY, COMPRISES SOME 30 DEPUTIES
WHO FIRST GOT TOGETHER IN MAY 1975. ITS MEMBERS REPRESENT
SOME OF THE MOST APERTURISTA ELEMENTS IN THE CORTES,
INCLUDING THREE FORMER LEADER GRANTEES TO THE U.S.
THIS GROUP, WHICH HAS A BASIC COMMITMENT TO A MORE
DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, HAS HAD NO BINDING RULES,
BUT IN PRACTICE, HAS SET A PATTERN OF BLOCK VOTING WHICH
HAS APPARENTLY SERVED AS THE MODEL FOR THE RECENT CHANGE.

4. SINCE THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW RULES AT LEAST FOUR OTHER
EMBRYO PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS HAVE BEEN FORMED. THEY ARE:
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(A) THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE NATION
MADE UP PRIMARILY OF MEMBERS OF THE CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL
ASSOCIATION "ANEPA", (B) A GROUP CONSISTING OF MEMBERS OF
SILVA MUNOZ' CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC "UNION DEMOCRATICA
ESPANOL" (UDE), (C) A GROUP CONSISTING OF MEMBERS OF THE
CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ASSOCIATION "UNION OF THE SPANISH
PEOPLE", AND (D) A GROUP REPRESENTING A NUMBER OF
WELL-KNOWN APERTURISTA POLITICIANS.

5. A UDE LEADER AND CORTES DEPUTY, ANDRES REGUERA, HAS PUBLICLY VOICED WHAT MANY OTHER OBSERVERS HAVE SAID IN PRIVATE: THE SANCTIONING OF PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS IS A STEP IN A PROCESS OF POLITICALIZATION OF THE PARLIAMENT WHICH COULD LEAD TO THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN A FUTURE ELECTORAL CONTEST. NONE OF THIS CHANGES THE BASICALLY INREPRESENTATIVE NATURE OF THE CORTES, LARGELY COMPRISED OF MEN SELECTED BY APPOINTMENT AND SECOND-DEGREE ELECTIONS, BUT IT IS PART OF THE PROCESS OF OPENING UP THE SYSTEM AND PART OF THE GOS STRATEGY TO PLACE PRESSURE ON THE RELUCTANT CORTES TO SUPPORT REFORM.
STABLER

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